Communication, Engagement and Deliberation:

Rethinking Democracy for the 21ˢᵗ Century

Researchers within the Media School at Bournemouth University (BU) have long been at the cutting edge in analysing the societal impacts of digital communication technologies. In particular we offer expertise within the following areas:

- The potential (positive and negative) of new technologies for democracy and societal well-being;
- The cognitive and psychological impacts of interactive technologies for political engagement;
- Improving social literacy levels (understanding current affairs and the communication of news) through interactions via technology;
- Youth social engagement and the mechanisms for enhancing participation in civic life;
- The role new technologies play for mobilising citizens and increasing a range of forms of political and civic activism and citizen journalism;
- The role of technology (such as mobile applications) in simplifying citizen interfaces with public bodies.

We are engaged in several key projects, see for example our Games for Civic Change project in the appendix, and initiatives that might be of assistance to the Speaker's Commission and can design, develop, test and launch any of these tools as required. Please see Appendix A for more information.

In responding to the call to input into the Speakers' Commission on Digital Democracy we have prepared a discussion paper that stretches across all five of the Commission's themes, and highlights a number of important questions informed by our expertise in these areas that can have real influence and impact in reshaping the accessibility, accountability and representativeness of a modern parliament.

Theme 1: New technologies – the intellectual challenge

There is a tendency to see new technologies as purely beneficial and lending to ideals of democracy. However in actuality there are more questions than answers relating to the impact of new technologies that are worthy of consideration. There are four interrelated issues we highlight, based on our own work and thinking reflected in recent journalism/ media & communications studies:

1. The role of digital communications in facilitating protest and issues of contagion;

2. The question of whether social media has created a "virtual" public sphere facilitating better political dialogue and engagement;

3. The ability of government to control the message in a world of social media;

4. The technological role of social media in influencing the news agenda.

Clearly, academic study and analysis of each of these topics is expanding at a rapid pace; each issue can also be addressed from the perspective of many different academic disciplines. The following therefore only scratches the surface of such a vast topic, but raises important points worthy of consideration as we talk of the notion of digital democracy.

1) The role of digital communications in facilitating protest and issues of contagion

Much has been made of the role of social media in the "Arab Spring" and, closer to home, in the London (and other) inner city riots of summer 2011. The Arab Spring has even been termed by some as the Facebook or Twitter revolutions. Cottle (2011: 651) observes that there is a danger of over-estimating claims of the power of social media to foment protest and revolution, leading to charges of media centrism and technological determinism, hiding social and political forces at work. At the same time, however, he states that it is difficult to deny claims that social media have played a role in coalescing broad based political movements and channelling communication.

It is therefore less about cause and effect, which is so difficult to determine, and more about how media systems and new communications networks interact as part of a new media ecology. Increasingly this ecology sees new and old media working in tandem, with social media alerting established media organizations to protests, with each drawing on each other through links and redistribution methods such as "re-tweeting." Sometimes this dynamic occurs spontaneously and traditional media lose their dominant role in informing the public. This was clearly evident from the demonstrations in Tahrir Square that led to the end of President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule of Egypt. A survey of how 1,200 Egyptian protestors used social media in early 2011 showed that about half of those who responded had a Facebook profile and almost all of those used it for communicating about the protests (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). At other times, the dissemination of opposing political voices is far more organized. Since early protests in 2011, Syrian anti-government activists have systemically produced, aggregated and disseminated eyewitness videos and still pictures through websites, social media feeds and opposition news networks (Pantii 2013: 1). This was particularly evident in the chemical weapons attack on a suburb of Damascus in summer 2013. A common theme of both spontaneous and organized uses of social media for protest is that dissenting voices in such repressive regimes manage to successfully bypass state controlled national media (Cottle, 2011: 648).

Digital communication technologies have therefore become inseparable from conflict and now constitute a space where "the bodies on the street" can appear to distant audiences (Butler, 2011). The media thus become inextricably linked into the process (2011: 8): "The street scenes become politically potent only when and if we have a visual and audible version of the scene communicated in live time, so that the media does not merely report the scene but is part of the scene and the action; indeed, the media is the scene or the space in its extended and replicable visual and audible dimensions."

2) Has social media created a "virtual" public sphere?

Outside the area of protest and conflict, equally bold claims have been made about social media in extending the role of the public in the political and social sphere, effectively creating a digital equivalent of the public sphere and halting its decline (Papacharissi, 2002: 10). The concept of the public sphere has been widely represented as a romanticized ideal no longer achievable, with Habermas (1962/ 1989) tracing its decline from the 18th Century coffee house culture in which public discussion was said to inform rational decision-making in the public interest. Many academics have questioned whether this idealized concept in fact ever existed but the explosion of social media has polarized opinion on whether technology can in fact enable a virtual public sphere. Vast amounts of academic literature have been produced on this subject. In a review of that debate, now 10 years old but still valid in its fundamental outline of the conflicting forces at play, Papacharissi cites the pros and cons of the argument:

•   Firstly, for those with access to computers and social media tools the Internet is a valuable resource for political participation; on the other hand, moving political discussion to a virtual space excludes those with no access. The fact that such access is limited recalls the fact that the 18th Century coffee house ideal of the public sphere was in fact dominated by the male bourgeoisie (ibid: 14).

•   Secondly, Internet access can connect people from diverse backgrounds and geographies to provide a forum for political discussion; but it does not automatically follow that greater participation in political discussion will promote democratic ideas. It can also fragment discourse and there is no guarantee that people from different cultural backgrounds will be more understanding of each other (ibid: 16).

•   Thirdly, given the power of capitalism and commercial forces, it is quite possible that Internet technologies will adapt to the current political culture rather than create a new one. The power of advertising and concentration of ownership are key in potentially transforming new technologies into commercially oriented media that have little to do with promoting social welfare (ibid: 20).

Ultimately, Papacharissi concludes that the Internet and related technologies have created a new public space for politically oriented conversation. But whether this transcends to a public sphere is not up to the technology itself. "Cheap, fast and convenient access to more information does not necessarily render all citizens more informed or more willing to participate in political discussion (ibid: 22)."

3) The ability of government to control the message in a world of social media

As the uprisings of the Arab Spring and countless other examples illustrate, there is now nowhere to hide. In what has been called "the new visibility" (Thompson, 2005: 32), unedited footage is finding its way into mainstream news outlets via ordinary citizens armed with little more than a mobile phone. This has exposed wrongdoing and abuse of power in a wide range of environments: police violence against a newspaper seller Ian Tomlinson on the streets of London during G-20 riots in 2009; images of Iraqi prisoners being subjected to torture and degradation at the U.S.-run prison Abu Ghraib in 2004; and last year's chemical weapons attack on civilians in the Ghouta suburb of Damascus. The latter incident provides a graphic comparison with the pre-internet era. When Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons in 1988 to kill about 5,000 of his own citizens at Halabja, there were no mobile phones to capture the horror and it took several days for still pictures to emerge. Some 25 years later, some of the mobile phone footage from Ghouta was incorporated into the BBC's main television news bulletins shortly after being posted on the web. The advantages are not wholly without qualification. Mainstream news organizations that used the pictures generally added a disclaimer, such as the one use by The Guardian on its website: "These pictures cannot yet be independently verified." In the immediate aftermath, news organizations, whose correspondents had not been present at the attack, asked the same question as the viewer – did this footage (there were about 100 individual videos uploaded) result from an attack by the ruling Syrian regime or was it perpetrated by rebels with the express intention of sucking Western powers into the conflict? Two days after the attack, The Guardian's website provided an interactive map showing where social media sources were located around Damascus, detailing what was reported and attributing a "reliability score" to each source on a scale of 1-5 (The Guardian, 2013). In the end, it was left to UN weapons inspectors to carry out the verification and decide how 1,429 civilians were killed but the "new visibility" provided by social media means that abuse of power is under scrutiny as never before and those in power are finding it increasingly difficult to control the message. Thomson states (2005: 31): "In this new world of mediated visibility, the making visible of actions and events is not just the outcome of leakage in systems of communication and information flow that are increasingly difficult to control; it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be weapons in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives."

The uncontrollable nature of this new visibility has led the leaders of some oppressive regimes to attempt to censure or block Internet communications. Censorship and manipulation of the news is, of course, nothing new and can be traced all the way back in history. The British government operated a regime of censorship in the 1982 Falklands conflict and the 1990 Gulf War, opting more a more subtle method of manipulation for the 2003 Gulf War by "embedding" journalists with fighting units. More recent examples show how repressive regimes are trying to counter the impact of social media. In his final days in power, Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak turned off the Internet and SMS services for a week but within days clandestine FTP servers were set up to ensure mobile phone footage could be transmitted to the West (Cottle, 2011: 653). Earlier in June this year on the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre the Chinese government blocked searches relating to the protests and their repression. China's "Great Firewall" or Golden Shield project had become operational as long ago as 2003 and has a series of technological capabilities to block IP addresses and monitor Internet traffic.

The organization Index on Censorship http://www.indexoncensorship.org/ gives a comprehensive overview of such issues while the Snowdon revelations reveal the lengths to which western security forces have gone to conduct surveillance of phone and internet communications / http://www.theguardian.com/world/edward-snowden.   Any investigation of digital democracy would need to explore these issues in detail.

4) The technological role of social media in influencing the news agenda

It is widely assumed that in a world where the consumer can access news at anytime, anywhere, on any platform of his or her choosing, that we must be better informed. There are, however, two powerful arguments to suggest that this is not necessarily the case: the first is the political economy of today's media and the devastating impact of social media on business models; the second is the potential of algorithms to influence the choice of news topics and news agendas.

The world of traditional newsgathering is undergoing sweeping changes, which could arguably undermine the ability of the media to hold power to account. The combination of a technological revolution, new (and as yet not fully understood) business rules, and global recession has created, to use a cliché, a "perfect storm." The result has been a wave of cost cutting and consolidation in ownership. This in turn is reducing the plurality of the news offering, leading to an ever more homogenized news agenda in which news gathering is being replaced by news packaging. It is abundantly clear that the advertising model that supported newspapers throughout the 20th Century has collapsed. Younger audiences have deserted newspapers for the immediacy of the online environment; this in turn has attracted advertisers who can more accurately target their audiences online and can better track the impact of their spending (Freedman, 2010: 35). The global recession has simply compounded the problem, striking the British local and regional newspaper industry particularly hard. Sly Bailey, the (now ex-) chief executive of the UK newspaper group Trinity Mirror, spelt out this double-headed blow in her evidence to the Leveson Inquiry:

"The pressures on the business over about the last five years have been intense, and the businesses face two challenges. One, which is structural, as we see the growth of new devices... first of all we saw the internet and now we're seeing new tablet devices and smart phones and the proliferation of news and information on those sources. And, at the same time, the business has been under the most intense cyclical pressure as a result of the poor economy… we've been through the cycle and we're bumping along the bottom...."

This economic storm has had a devastating impact on the craft of journalism and traditional newsgathering. In 2009, Nick Davies, an investigative journalist with The Guardian who has played a major role in exposing tabloid phone hacking, broke the taboo that dog does not eat dog by writing a scathing book about the state of the media. Entitled Flat Earth News, it sets out Davies's central argument that less and less original news is being generated. Partly because of cost cutting and partly because of the need for speed, fewer stories are being written, fewer stories are being checked and increasingly newspapers are falling back on agency copy and public relations material. Davies (2009: 59) states:

"This is churnalism. This is journalists failing to perform the simple basic functions of their profession; quite unable to tell their readers the truth about what is happening on their patch. This is journalists who are no longer out gathering news but who are reduced instead to passive

processors of whatever material comes their way, churning out stories, whether real events or PR artifice, important or trivial, true or false."

This damning verdict on the media is supported by academic research that Davies commissioned for the book at Cardiff University. Their researchers examined the news sections of five mainstream newspapers, The Guardian, The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Independent and The Daily Mail. They found that 60 per cent of stories were wholly or partly made up copy either taken from the Press Association or from public relations agencies. A further 20 per cent of stories contained clear elements from these sources. In fact, the researchers were only able to state with any certainty that 12 per cent of the copy was original and generated by a newspaper's own staff. That shocking finding illustrates the extent to which the content of today's newspapers and their online sites has been reduced to a commodity and has become infiltrated by PR. The term coined by Davies, "churnalism" has stuck and has major implications in assessing the ability of today's press to perform the function of holding power to account.

The second issue that may in fact impinge on the democratizing nature of the Internet is the increasingly widespread use of algorithms to influence, both directly through technology and indirectly through human choice, the news agenda. Dijck and Poell (2013) argue that the production of news is clearly impacted by the algorithmic formulae in search engines and social media, which in turn drive users towards particular content (often to generate advertising revenue). Algorithms based on "liking", "sharing", "rating" or "favouriting" content, can often dictate the order in which such content appears on news "aggregator" sites. The question is whether such prioritisation and trends also influence the editorial decision-making of journalists working for other media organisations. Are they tempted to make the same decisions and follow a herd instinct and, if they do not, do they risk harming the financial prospects of their own outlet if their editorial decision-making does not align to advertising or sales? Is journalistic accountability being undermined by the power of such algorithms to dictate the news agenda? Dijck and Poell argue that social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook are far from neutral platforms (2013: 2).

This broad context raises numerous questions regarding the nature and shape of communication via new technologies and so what impact that communication might have on citizens and more broadly on the relations between political organisations and those they serve. Our research suggests some responses to these issues and pointers for how to construct a digital communication strategy that has the potential to enhance democracy.

Theme 2: Contagion and Reach

Research shows how in the modern age the reach of the communication of any organisation is only partially reliant on the budget and strategy of the organisation itself. From the Arab spring to the success of local hostelries it is the citizen/consumer who has a key role in determining reach. More importantly, it is the citizen/consumer who has a key role in shaping reputations.

Research from a consumer behaviour perspective demonstrates that organisations must be responsive to their consumers, and facilitate means for interaction to enable smart product innovations. There is evidence that these ideas are increasingly applied also to the realm of politics (Bang, 2008) where citizens wish to feel they are consulted with on policies that impact upon their lives and well-being. The problem is that many current mechanisms for giving feedback (from the Big Conversation to Downing Street petitions) are seen as inadequate and with too many barriers to entry – put simply citizens feel many consultation exercises are hollow and in actuality there is no-one interested in their opinions.

Yet in many other realms we find empowerment. There are numerous ways where citizens, as part of established interest groups or within communities of interest that form locally offline or which manifest online, could be given an opportunity to have input into the policy making process. Some ideas are outlined later in this document and we would be interested in exploring how to develop these practices, and are happy to work with the SCDD to develop these ideas.

The virtual and vibrant public sphere

There has been a great deal of attention to how the internet and digital technology can enhance the quality of public deliberation, and facilitate greater opportunities for democratic participation. With respect to online spaces, until quite recently, much of this attention has been focussed explicitly on political online spaces: government and party webpages, political forums, e-democracy projects, online social movements and so on. Whilst much has been learned, we argue that there is more to be gained by understanding the dynamics of political discussion and mobilization in everyday, general interest online spaces. This approach allows us to explore and begin to understand the ways citizenship is intertwined with aspects and practices of everyday life.

At Bournemouth University – alongside other leading researchers – we have been studying how political talk emerges in online communities such as Netmums, MoneySavingExpert and DigitalSpy. In the former two forums in particular, we have found over 60% of all political discussions lead to a political action of some sort. Here, we witnessed how the forum moderators successfully engaged the community members with government consultations related to family matters (Netmums) and personal finance (MSE). The key point here is that the vast majority of the people in these forums are not political junkies - quite the opposite – but they are able to be successfully engaged with policy making when it's a) within their area of (self) interest, and b) on a platform they inhabit, rather than a formally political one.

We think there are opportunities to develop these practices to other such general interest communities, and are happy to work with the SPDD to develop this further.

The control question

It is fallacious to believe that any organisation, as we suggest above, can control the message in the modern age. However, that does not mean that there is no longer any such thing as communicative power. Rather power is derived in differing ways. The power of any organisation is predicated upon the number of individuals who cognitively engage with their communication, respond to communication positively and share it. Power thus can be measured by whether an organisation's communication is able to be amplified and extend the reach and impact of its communication.

In the Web 2.0 world there are conversations happening on any issue, the choice is to be outside of that conversation or an active player. Politicians, in particular parliamentarians, choose to stand outside of the conversation, hoping to feed and be talked about but largely eschewing mechanisms that allows them to be talked with (Koc-Michalska & Lilleker, 2013). Yet the win-win zone that a minority of parliamentarians enjoy is where they are able to garner support and legitimacy through involving their constituents in their deliberations, using them as sources of information and ideas and a sounding board. Such activities do not undermine the sovereignty of the legislator, rather it connects them publicly with the communities they serve leading to greater transparency, a better representative link and accountability over decision-making.

Being part of the conversation is important; the challenge is to be at the heart of the conversation. This means being connected to citizens who, in turn, feel empowered, are engaged and wish to work towards a positive and mutually beneficial outcome. For many organisations this is perceived as the ultimate win-win zone. This works in many consumer contexts and the ideas are ones which can easily translate to politics. We would be interested in exploring how to bridge the worlds of the consumer and the citizen, and can propose scenarios involving a variety of tools and purposes for the SCDD to develop a communication strategy that involves citizens to a greater extent.

The news information cycle

We no longer live in an age where large organisations can simply contact a journalist and shape the news. It happens, but there is far less predictability regarding the news agenda and how news is made. As Andrew Chadwick (2011) showed, a breaking news story can be shaped by multiple sources across multiple platforms (from traditional sources to bloggers, Twitter users etc.). Being newsworthy is no longer guaranteed, hence we find so little of what happens in parliament reaching the front pages. One reason is that there is little to report that connects easily to the lives of media audiences, the language is inaccessible, the traditions archaic, the outcomes nebulous. Citizens, in particular, see parliament as closed off to them, something they barely understand the workings of, and remote from the everyday lives of citizens (Scullion et al, 2013).

The solution to making parliament more interesting to journalists and their audiences is making the decision-making processes more accessible to the citizen. For there to be more inclusivity in debates, a greater sense that it is the citizen who is at the heart of decision-making (having both input and benefiting) rather than parliament being riven by partisanship. There are numerous mechanisms where the citizen could have a say, prior to and during debates and we would be developing mechanisms for public input that provide the democracy the 21st century consumer citizen enjoys in other realms of their lives.

Theme 3: Imagining the Digital Parliament

In constitutional law it is traditionally held that a foundational tenet of the UK constitution is that Parliament, particularly the executive, is the supreme law-maker: it can make any law it wishes (although this is contested). It is also accepted that Parliament has the equally important constitutional role of scrutinising the executive.

Both roles rely on the assumption that Parliament is a democratic chamber through which citizens' interests are represented. If Parliament ceases to be a properly democratic body then its fundamental constitutional role of 'collective deliberation and decision making' (R v Chaytor [2010] UKSC 52, [62]) would be undermined and lose legitimacy: Parliament would no longer be the citizens' proxy for law-making and accountability.

Maintaining these constitutional underpinnings means at least in part that Parliament must harness digital technology to ensure citizens remain adequately represented and dialogically engaged with Parliament during lawmaking and scrutiny. This could be done in various ways; perhaps most obviously by exploring how technology can facilitate dialogue between MP and constituent (Lilleker, 2005; Leston-Bandeira 2012). Our case study focuses on Select Committees (SCs), whose roles straddle the lawmaking and scrutinising functions of Parliament. We briefly explains why SCs have an important constitutional role, why this role would be enhanced by the utilisation of new technology, and make some suggestions about how technology could help.

Digital Select Committees – a thought for the future

SCs have a well-known role: essentially they scrutinise government departments on matters including policy, expenditure, and legislation. The public, individually or through civil society, can send SCs evidence, and can access reports and witness statements. SCs themselves are increasingly seen as influences on the government and as effective forums for scrutiny and accountability. Russell and Benton (2011, p.8) concluded that SCs were important in 'contributing to debate, drawing together evidence, spotlighting issues … improving the quality of government decision-making through accountability, exposing failures, and … "generating fear" [in government officials about the SC's anticipated reactions]'.

Constitutionally, this makes SCs vital parts of the UK's 'political constitution', an understanding of the constitution predicated on the idea that politics should be (or is) the ultimate controlling factor over executive power and the content of laws (Tomkins 2003). Power to establish and enforce constitutional norms is vested in the citizenry or their elected representatives. The Parliamentary scrutiny process, including SCs, is essential for this to operate successfully.

Using digital technology to bolster public representation, engagement and/or dialogue with SCs, for example by making it easier to access reports, to submit evidence, to communicate with SC members on relevant matters, or to see the impact of their recommendations, would be welcome. Engagement does not necessarily need direct participation: easily accessible and transparent SC materials could inform the public and provoke them to become more engaged in politics (Williamson and Fallon 2011). This is in line with the Brazier and Fox (2011, pp.366-368)'s recommendation that 'Parliament should belatedly take the opportunity to convey to both media and the public that much of its best work takes place in committee rooms … the public like the style of parliamentary work

that select committees undertake'. If digital media can make SCs more accessible it will support the political constitution and democracy.

Research here and elsewhere highlights how email (Jackson & Lilleker, 2004; Williamson 2009), MP websites (Leston-Bandeira 2012; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Lilleker et al, 2011), and social media (Williamson and Fallon 2011; Koc-Michalska & Lilleker, 2013) can be used to foster engagement and dialogue between politicians and constituents. SCs themselves, or individual MPs, could adapt these measures to improve the relationship between SCs and the public. The #AskGove initiative by the Education Select Committee, where the public was asked to submit questions for the Committee to ask Michael Gove, is a possible model to follow.

Our research shows that digitisation can help citizens take advantage of consultative mechanisms. Our recommendations (with Select Committees as a case study) can position digital media within the UK's constitutional framework and assess how it fits with republican or deliberative norms.

Recommendations

If the political understanding of our constitution is to continue into the digital age, technology should build on existing modes of citizen representation, engagement, and dialogue with Parliament such as SCs. We would recommend that:

1. Digital methods of encouraging and enabling the public's ability to give evidence to Committees, or to respond to official papers, should be pursued. The #AskGove initiative by the Education Committee might be a model here. There is scope to explore how Twitter can be used to facilitate dialogue between the public and SCs, and to consider how much more effectively SCs can communicate what they are doing and the impact of their work.

2. Explorations of how digital technology may improve the link between MP and constituent are a likely outcome of this Commission. If so they should also consider how MPs, whether or not they sit on SCs, could funnel public views towards the relevant Committee.

Yet these recommendations must sit within a broader communication framework which must adhere to key principles in order to cognitively engage citizens.

Principles of digital civic engagement

1. Focus on issues that are relevant to people's everyday life

> *Common mistake: focusing the message on abstract concepts such as 'engagement' and 'participation', which mean little to audiences beyond academic and political elites.*

Contemporary publics are unlikely to engage with politics out of an abstract sense of civic duty and they find it difficult to see the relevance or importance of processes and institutions. Focusing on specific issues that affect people is a good entry point into political participation. As internet users are exposed to global stimuli on a daily basis, engagement projects must be ***globally aware and relevant***.

2. Combine macro-social change with micro-social benefits

It is vital that citizens can see the benefits of their participation. These do not necessarily have to be material, and could be ***moral or emotional***, but they have to be clearly signposted and, as much as possible, ***tangible***. Our research on successful NGO websites dealing with global issues such as poverty and climate change showed that:

> *"their online strategies framed macro-political values and issues (including sustainable farming and environmental protection) through micro-political, everyday actions and offered a range of awareness and participation tools. As such, they seem more capable of meeting the criteria for the development of civic efficacy and youth mobilisation based on the blurring of the boundaries between citizenship and consumer practice… " (Gerodimos 2008).*

3. Create an engagement project that has a specific timeframe combining specific, short-term goals with strategic and long-term engagement.

Common mistake: expecting that users will engage with a project or scheme that looks set to be abandoned soon or that has no measurable objectives

The best way of achieving digital engagement is through fast-paced, short-term campaigns that have simple, ***feasible targets*** (e.g. Avaaz's online petitions), which over time build trust and loyalty towards the engagement facilitator.

4. Emphasise results, track record and potential for change

Users tend to engage with campaigns that have a ***'feel good'*** factor; campaigns based on hope and a realistic chance of making a difference. Building a positively-framed institutional track record of successful initiatives allows citizens to trust and invest in the project.

5. Invest in an attractive and accessible design

In a rapidly evolving global field in which political issues and processes compete against every other conceivable theme and practice of human life, a civic engagement campaign has to provide users with an attractive and usable environment.

Our research on user evaluations of civic websites showed that ***a positive user experience*** can challenge negative preconceptions about an organisation (Gerodimos 2012); it is well known that such judgments are initially made within a few moments of looking at a website and can only usually change if there is a significantly good or bad experience during the visit.

6. Focus on the visual and emotional aspects of communication

The main challenge facing today's internet users is not an information deficit, but ***information fatigue*** and attention scarcity. Focusing on a minimal number of key messages and actions, utilising white space and elegant visuals, facilitating an emotional, empathetic connection between the user and the cause or issue are all key to achieving engagement.

Appendix A

Through its partnerships and research, BU is helping develop innovative digital practices that are boosting civic engagement across the world

Games for civic change

BU has an ongoing collaboration with the Engagement Game Lab at Emerson College in Boston (http://engagementgamelab.org/) – one of the world's leading applied research labs focusing on the development and study of games, technology, and new media to enhance civic life. Working in partnership with organisations such as the Red Cross and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the EGL designs and develops games that are transforming communities and engaging citizens across many cities in the United States and in countries such as Moldova and Zambia. The EGL's partnership with the Boston Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics is changing the way government and universities collaborate to foster civic engagement through technological innovations.

Media literacy and civic empowerment

BU is one of the founding partners of the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change – a global multi-purpose programme on media literacy, which brings together faculty, leading practitioners and top students from five continents to develop innovative curricula and tools. Media literacy is one of the most important prerequisites and drivers of civic empowerment as it ensures that citizens – and especially youth, as well as people from disadvantaged backgrounds – have the skills and tools to access, critically engage with and produce globally relevant media output.

Our *global media literacy curricula* have been downloaded by thousands of schools in many countries, while our *research on youth media habits, digital engagement and urban challenges* (The World Unplugged, The Tethered World, On Cities) has engaged academia, governments and leading news organisations around the world.

Urban engagement through digital tools

We are currently working to develop *innovative digital prototypes* that will enable young people to engage with their local communities and the broader civic culture:

- Collecting and curating *oral histories* can be a very powerful way for citizens to meet people from different ethnic, religious, sexual or socio-economic backgrounds and learn more about the history and diversity of their communities;

pushing them out of their comfort zone and challenging their preconceptions, which are both key to meaningful civic interaction

- Producing **visual storytelling** can be a very powerful tool of empowerment and civic voice: through **photo-essays** and narrated **audio slide-shows** citizens can connect with and showcase urban spots which are interesting because of their history, design, uses or even current problems

Through our ongoing research and global partnerships, BU can design, develop, test and launch any of these tools as part of the Speaker's Commission work.

The Media School Researchers

Darren Lilleker PhD, is Director of the Centre for Public Communication and Associate Professor in The Media School, Bournemouth University. Dr Lilleker's expertise is in the professionalization and marketization of politics, and its impacts on public engagement; within the latter area he has focused in particular on the impacts of digital technologies. He has published widely including the textbook *Key Concepts in Political Communication* (Sage, 2006), and *Political Communication and Cognition* (Palgrave, 2014) *Political Campaigning, Elections and the Internet* (Routledge, 2011) and has co-edited *The Marketing of Political Parties* (MUP, 2006), *Voters or Consumers* (CSP, 2008) and *Political Marketing in Comparative Perspective* (MUP, 2005).

Roman Gerodimos PhD, focuses on the challenges facing democracy in the 21st century, in particular on emerging patterns and forms of civic engagement in an era of accelerated globalisation, individualism and digitization. He was visiting scholar at Emerson College in Boston, carrying out fieldwork on the relationship between urban public space and the civic culture, as well as on the role of digital literacy in youth engagement with local and global issues. Since 2010 he has been a faculty member at the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change. His background is in political science, European politics and international studies (BSc, Panteion University of Athens; MSc / Government, LSE), with an extensive record of research on the factors that motivate young people to engage with public affairs looking at the civic potential of NGO and youth websites. His PhD thesis won the 2010 Arthur McDougall Prize for Best Dissertation by the Political Studies Association (PSA).

Daniel Jackson PhD, is researcher, educator and consultant in the field of media, communication and politics. His research broadly explores the intersection of media and democracy, including news coverage of politics, the construction of news, political communication, and political talk online. He is co-convenor of the Political Studies Association Media and Politics Group and hosted its annual conference at BU in 2011 and 2013. Recent work focuses on how citizens engage with political issues through online talk, focusing on the use of non-political forums as spaces for debate and discussion.

David Yuratich PhD is a lecturer in law with research interests in public and EU law. He is particularly interested in the relationships between courts and democracy, and wrote his PhD thesis on the democracy-building role of the Court of Justice of the European Union. His interests have broadened into focusing on consultations around law-making, and the use of digital tools for effective public deliberation within a framework exploring models of democracy and e-democracy.

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